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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DAKAR 000263

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PU](#) [XY](#)

SUBJECT: GUINEA-BISSAU: PRESIDENT AND ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF  
STAFF ASSASSINATED

Classified By: Classified by AMB Marcia Bernicat for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: On the evening of March 1, the Chief of Staff for the Bissau-Guinean military was killed when a bomb exploded near his office. Approximately eight hours later, soldiers opened fire on the home of the president, ostensibly in retaliation for the assassination of the military chief. A spokesman for the military subsequently pledged that the armed forces would respect the constitution and civilian rule. According to the constitution, the president of the National Assembly immediately becomes interim president of the country with a mandate to hold new elections within 60 days. The resident diplomatic corps and international representatives have created a working group of ambassadors to assist the government during the transition of power. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) On March 1, 2009, at approximately 8:00 p.m. local time, an explosion at the Bissau-Guinean military headquarters building killed Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Tagme Na Wai. According to media reports, the explosion resulted from a bomb placed under the stairway leading to Na Wai's office and resulted in the collapse of a large portion of the headquarters building. Reportedly five other soldiers were injured, two severely. Na Wai's body was recovered from the debris approximately two hours later and was transported to a military base near the airport. Following the attack, the military ordered radio and television stations to cease transmission and pledged to pursue those responsible for the violence.

3. (SBU) At approximately 4:30 am on March 2, soldiers, Na Wai loyalists from his stronghold in Mansoa, opened fire on the private residence of President Joao Bernardo Vieira with artillery and small-arms fire. President Vieira was shot and killed as he fled his residence. Vieira's personal assistant was also killed, while his press secretary was seriously injured. Unconfirmed reports state that the soldiers cut off the hand of the press secretary. Vieira's wife was reportedly injured and allowed to seek refuge in the Angolan Embassy in Bissau.

4. (SBU) Although artillery blasts and weapons fire were heard until approximately 6:10 a.m., it is unclear to what extent, if any, the soldiers charged with protecting Vieira actually returned fire in defense of the President. Following the cessation of violence, soldiers reportedly looted Vieira's home. Vieira's body was transported to the home of a nearby relative. When an ambulance appeared to transport his body to the morgue, an angry mob surrounded the ambulance demanding to know where they were taking the body.

5. (C) Also in the early morning hours of March 2, according

to Lucinda Ahukarie, Director of the Judicial Police, soldiers went to the Judicial Police detention facility and freed all of its prisoners, including six members of the armed forces charged with the November 23, 2008, attack on Vieira,s residence. Later that morning, soldiers returned to the Judicial Police headquarters and demanded that police officials turn over several kilograms of cocaine that had been seized in a previous Judicial Police operation.

¶6. (C) A military committee has been established and its spokesman, Captain Zamora Induta, confirmed in interviews with the press that the military was responsible for Vieira,s death (although some reports indicated that the military was blaming the President's death on civilians angry with the President for his alleged role in the attack on the chief of staff). Induta also insinuated retaliation was the motive for the attack on the president when he stated that Vieira was &one of the main people responsible for the death of Tagme.<sup>8</sup> There are press reports that Induta has proclaimed himself the new military chief of staff but has refrained from making any claim to political power, insisting that civilians would remain in charge of the government in accordance with the constitution. Other sources also suggested that Induta, the head of the Na Wai loyalists from Mansoa, may be a de facto leader in what is otherwise a military power vacuum. However, according to the Portuguese Charge d'Affaires Eduardo Rafael, Induta has not taken on the role of chief of staff of the armed forces. Instead, the chiefs of the three branches of the armed forces -- army, navy, and air force -- have established a joint chiefs committee to control the military pending the designation of a new chief of staff. In another conflicting report, Major

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General Malam Camara, Director of Military Cooperation of the Ministry of Defense, stated that in the hours following Na Wai,s death, Vieira appointed Army Chief of Staff Major General Mamadou Toure to assume the role of Armed Forces Chief of Staff, a role that he reportedly continues to fill.

¶7. (SBU) In the absence of any military claims to power, Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior remains in effective, if tenuous, control of the government. Gomes convened an emergency meeting of his cabinet the morning of March 2. In accordance with Article 71 of the constitution, the recently elected president of the National Assembly, Raimundo Pereira, became interim president of the country immediately upon the death of the head of state. Diplomatic sources informed Post that the Council of State invited Pereira, a Gomes loyalist and vice-president of the ruling African Party for the Independence of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC), to assume his role as interim president until new presidential elections can be held within 60 days, in accordance with the constitution. However, according to the United Nations Peace-Building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), UNOGBIS, given that Pereira's election as National Assembly president was disputed (the prime minister was forced to rely on opposition party votes to ensure Pereira's election), the National Assembly has convened a commission charged with formally vesting Pereira with the authority of interim president.

¶8. (SBU) Another point of debate is whether the interim president has the power to appoint a chief of staff. A National Assembly committee has been established to determine the constitutionality of this issue. The resident diplomatic corps has nevertheless agreed to work only with the civilian government and not to recognize any self-appointed military officials.

¶9. (SBU) The head of UNOGBIS, Representative of the Secretary General (RSG) Joseph Mutaboba, convened a meeting of the resident diplomatic corps and representatives of international organizations on March 2 to discuss how the international community should respond. It was agreed that a small working group of countries/organizations would be

established to assist the government during the transition of power. Mutaboba, who recently assumed his functions in Bissau, will lead the group, which will include the ambassadors of Angola, Brazil, Nigeria, Portugal, Senegal, and Spain, as well as the representative of the European Commission (EC).

¶10. (SBU) The Bissau-Guinean Foreign Minister convened a meeting of the diplomatic corps, also on March 2, during which she announced that the government had declared a seven-day period of mourning and would be announcing details on the state funerals for both former President Viera and former Chief of Staff General Na Wai. She appealed to the international community for help.

¶11. (C) Comment: It is unclear at this time who is responsible for the deaths of these two leaders. One relatively plausible scenario is that Vieira, who was always uncomfortable with his sworn enemy Na Wai acting as chief of staff (and whom he suspected of having a hand, if only a passive one, in the November 2008 attempt on his life) decided to remove his rival via military forces loyal to the President. In retaliation, Na Wai loyalists assassinated the president. It is also entirely possible that narco-traffickers and/or drug money precipitated these events. Suspicion has immediately fallen on the former Naval Chief of Staff, Admiral Jose Americo Bubo Na Tchute, who is under loose house arrest in the Gambia after having fled Guinea-Bissau for his alleged involvement in an aborted assassination/coup attempt in August 2008. Admiral Na Tchute is widely believed to have been actively involved in the drug trade.

¶12. (C) In addition to Na Tchute, former President Kumba Yala stands to benefit from the removal of Vieira and Na Wai from the scene. Yala, whose Social Renewal Party (PRS) was soundly defeated in the November 2008 parliamentary elections, is regarded by many as the de facto leader of the Balanta ethnic group, which makes up 90 percent of the officer corps, although only approximately 30 percent of the national population. Although the death of Vieira removes a persistent rival to Gomes, consolidation of power, it is not clear to what extent the Prime Minister will or will not benefit from these events. The stark fact he has no power

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base in the military has not changed with the death of the former president and chief of staff. Conceivably the removal of Na Wai could make much needed security sector reform -- and fighting narcotics trafficking -- easier to implement if civilian rule can be consolidated. Although reports indicate that National Assembly President Pereira privately began on March 2 performing the duties of the office of interim president, publicly he made no appearance or issued any declaration, in spite of several statements of firm support for a constitutional transition of power by military spokespeople, representatives of the diplomatic, and others. End Comment.  
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